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ABSTRACT

The new board member will always have concerns about his/her forthcoming trusteeship, such as determining how much time he/she is willing to devote to the job: how he/she should obtain orientation for the job: and what he/she should know about the controversial issues in which the board has previously been involved. In addressing the first of these concerns, the new trustee should realize that preparation for board meeting requires in-depth and time-consuming study. As for orientation, this can effected through the professional literature, workshops, formal orientation programs, trustee manuals, and through the support of fellow board members. Finally, an examination of the minutes of past board meetings will reveal several controversial incidents. At Yavapai College, for example, such incidents have included: (1) charges by the local press that the convening of an executive session was in violation of Arizona's open meeting law, the need to obtain legal counsel to answer these charges, and to determine how a quorum of members can formally gather: (2) the board's consideration of proposals that might have jeopardized community relations: (3) the development of a cooperative working relationship with a foundation associated with the college: and (4) the board's decision to require athletes to exceed minimum academic standards set by the American Junior College Athletics Association. (JP)

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I BECAME A TRUSTEE:

NOW WHAT?

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I BECAME A TRUSTEE: NOW WHAT?

A new conscientious board member will always have concerns about his forthcoming trusteeship. I'd like to address myself to three questions he might have. First, how much of himself is he able and willing to give? Second, how should he obtain his orientation for the job? Finally, what should he know about previous important or controversial issues in which his board has been involved?

To help you evaluate my remarks about these questions, let me provide some perspective about the board on which I serve. Yavapai College, in Prescott, Arizona, has a total enrollment of about 5,000 students and a full time student equivalent of about 2,000. Each of our five board members is elected by the voters of his county precinct for a period of four years. We have no committees on our board. Perhaps this accounts for our monthly meetings typically running from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. or later. However, each of us feels comfortable in examining all the details before coming to a conclusion. In addition to our monthly meetings, we attend a three day work session or retreat each summer to update the college goals and objectives for the coming year and discuss particular items we want to examine in depth.

Now, let's look at some answers to the questions I posed earlier. As to how much of oneself a person is able and willing to give to the job, let me state a fact. In order to be an effective trustee, one must spend a good deal of time at it. You have probably found yourself, as I have, collecting stacks of

documents and papers that require in-depth study. About a week in advance of each of our monthly meetings, the president's office sends each of us a substantial packet of papers pertaining to the agenda items to be discussed. The students and faculty are not the only ones who must do their homework. Yet, one of our most active trustees is a medical doctor with a surgical practice. His devotion to the board is a fine example to the rest of us.

Now let's discuss briefly where a board member should obtain the orientation that will help him be an effective trustee. One obvious answer is at workshops such as this. Association of Community College Trustees and Association of Governing Boards meetings and publications are extremely helpful and informative. In addition, an in-depth orientation program within one's own college is important. I was scheduled by our college president to spend time with each of the deans and administrators in order to better understand their functions. This, along with studying our Policy and Procedures Manual, and attending several cabinet meetings and State Board meetings, was the primary orientation I received. However, I feel strongly that the board itself should help new members understand their roles, duties and responsibilities.

The third question a new trustee might well ask pertains to previous actions and decisions of his board. Let's look at actual cases. I think you will find them interesting.

During our retreat two years ago, an editorial appeared in the Prescott paper titled "Board Lax on Open Meetings." This resulted from our meeting being called to order and a member

moving that the board meet in "executive caucus." The motion was seconded and passed and the audience was asked to leave the room. A young reporter went to the nearest telephone, called his editor, and reported that we had not specified the purpose of the "executive caucus." The editor immediately and angrily telephoned our college president, called him out of the meeting, and asked for an explanation. The editor's allegation of a possible violation of the open meeting law was dropped when both the board president and the college president agreed that the board was in error in calling an "executive caucus," that no decisions were made, and that it would not happen again. We are required to have open meetings in Arizona, and we can go into executive session for only a few reasons such as discussing specific personnel matters or consulting with our attorney.

Some time later, our board requested a legal opinion of our attorney as to how a quorum (three or more) of our members could get together without violating the open meeting law. The attorney's reply, in writing (and it's in my file), was:

> "If a quorum of the board is present, care should be taken that no discussion or exchange of facts takes place which concern or could reasonably be foreseen as requiring some action of the board."

We are all very careful that our conversations not concern board business when three or more of us find ourselves together outside our scheduled meetings.

Sometimes we have found it prudent to table an action until

we could obtain a legal opinion on a particular question. For example, a local radio station in Prescott broadcasts some of our baseball and basketball games. Last year, the owner of the station came before the board and requested that we grant him an exclusive five year contract for future sports broadcasts. The station had been doing a good job for us, and we were happy with its performance, but we hesitated to give it a five year monopoly at the exclusion of other radio stations. We requested a legal opinion prior to making our decision. The opinion was that we should grant no multi-year contracts.

We have found that good community relations are important. This was demonstrated recently when our Student Union Activities Commission requested the board to approve the installation of a large marquee at the entrance to our campus. One of our state universities has such a sign. It was to have flashing lights that could be programmed to portray messages to passersby. The students had obtained a tentative donation of the sign from a local bank and it would have displayed the bank's logo along with the messages. When this proposal was introduced to the board, several local citizens objected because the sign was significantly larger than specified in the city sign code. Yavapai College is on state property that adjoins the city of Prescott. We legally do not fall within city ordinances; however, in the interest of good community relations, we asked that the Student Union Activities Commission investigate whether or not the bank would supply a smaller version of the sign that would meet the city code. The bank was not interested in a

smaller sign and our decision was made for us. It is not logical that a community college should antagonize the community it serves.

Another instance concerned our working relationship with the foundation associated with our college. In its articles of incorporation, our foundation is allowed to acquire and use donated funds, on behalf of the college. During a recent board meeting, one of our trustees stated that our board should have jurisdiction over the foundation's scholarship funds. The matter was referred to counsel and the legal opinion was that the foundation had exclusive control over its scholarship funds. In order to have better coordination and understanding with the foundation, one of our board members now attends foundation meetings in a liaison capacity. Our foundation has, on two occasions, purchased land and buildings, on behalf of the college. The college then makes payments to the foundation until the land and/or buildings are paid off and the foundation retains title.

In addition, Yavapai College last year constructed, as a teaching project, a 2300 square foot solar house in Prescott. The house was built on a view lot purchased by the foundation. The house and lot are now in the process of being sold at a substantial profit. The profit will then be used to pay off the debt to the foundation for the purchase of the lot and to underwrite most of the salary of the instructor of the project. We hope to continue this process annually. Our foundation gives us a latitude of operation that would not be possible without

it. A good working relationship between it and the board is essential.

Finally, I would like to relate a recent exercise in which we took a hard look at our intercollegiate athletic program. It had been brought to the attention of one of our board members that certain athletes were apparently competing while failing or maintaining low grade point averages, although they technically met NJCAA and conference standards. In addition, it was alleged that athletes were being given preferential treatment.

The board devoted most of an all-day meeting to this problem with some interesting results. Prior to the meeting, the administration organized a Faculty Advisory Committee on Athletics which made a comprehensive study of the situation and submitted some detailed recommendations to the board. One of the 14 recommendations was for the appointment of a faculty advisor who would be responsible for all student athletes. After much discussion, our board accepted most of the recommendations and approved a plan whereby Yavapai College athletes would exceed the NJCAA minimum requirements of at least ten hours of college work, with a grade point average of 1.5 or better. In the future our athletes must complete a minimum of twelve hours and maintain a grade point average of 2.0 or better.

This new approach of emphasizing the scholastic aspect of student athletics by raising the eligibility requirements has created much comment--most of it complimentary. The first reaction of our coaches, however, was that they will have difficulty in recruiting. Time will tell whether or not our

decision was too idealistic. We don't think it is.

These then have been some specific board actions at Yavapai College. If a new trustee were to examine copies of our minutes for the past three years, he would discover that past boards had concluded that meetings in Arizona must be open except in a few special cases, that legal opinions should be obtained when any doubt exists, that it pays to have good relationships with the community and the foundation, and finally, that athletes should be given meaningful educations.

In closing, I would like to mention a conversation I had at a recent ACCT seminar. I happened to mention to a trustee I had just met that I enjoyed being a board member. His reply was, "If you enjoy it, you're not doing it correctly." I hope he wasn't right.

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